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SUBJECT: MUBARAK IN PARIS: CHIRAC URGES KEEPING
PRESSURE
ON SYRIA

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah
Rosenblatt
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Receiving Egyptian President Mubarak in Paris March 24, President Jacques Chirac stressed the necessity of maintaining firm pressure on Syria until it withdraws its armed forces and intelligence services fully from Lebanon, before elections this spring. Mubarak, who had met Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad at the March 22-23 Arab League Summit in Algiers, said Bashar had promised to complete the withdrawal; the Egyptian president added that he believed Syria would submit a precise timetable for its withdrawal to the UN within a week. An advisor to Chirac who was present told us that Mubarak made a strong pitch for Egypt's candidacy for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, receiving a noncommittal French response. On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Mubarak recalled his role in hosting the Sharon-Abbas meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh and in bringing Palestinian groups together, but was circumspect about the possibility of Sharon taking the next step after Gaza withdrawal, given what Mubarak assessed to be Sharon's tenuous domestic political standing. He commented that Jordan would have been better able to manage its proposal for Arab state normalization with Israel if King Abdallah had attended the Algiers summit. Mubarak deflected questions about Ayman Nour, the only declared opposition candidate for the September presidential elections in Egypt, by claiming that there was incontrovertible evidence of Nour's involvement in fraud. Mubarak reportedly evinced "a little exasperation" with U.S. efforts to persuade him to move more forthrightly on political reform. He was pessimistic on Iraq, believing the security situation was still far from being under control. End summary.

Chirac's main message: Syria must leave Lebanon

12. (C) President Chirac met first with Mubarak one-on-one to discuss Syria/Lebanon, Elysee Advisor for the Middle East and North Africa Dominique Boche told us March 25. Chirac's central message was to encourage Mubarak to keep the pressure on Syria for full military and intelligence services withdrawal from Lebanon as soon as possible, and certainly before the spring elections. Chirac emphasized that the international community "could not stop half-way" in its efforts to compel Syria to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1559. To do so would only invite the Syrians to delay and re-establish themselves indefinitely in Lebanon. Both in his response to Chirac, and in an interview he gave to the French daily Le Figaro, which appeared March 25, Mubarak said he believed Syria would complete its withdrawal soon. He recalled that he had met Bashar at the just-concluded Arab League Summit in Algiers and Bashar had promised him that he would complete the withdrawal. Mubarak told Chirac (and Le Figaro) that he believed Syria would submit a precise timetable for the withdrawal to the UN within a week. He said he had pressed Bashar hard in their meeting, warning him that he was isolated internationally and that he had to conform with 1559, according to Boche. Bashar also promised not to interfere in Lebanon's election, Mubarak told Le Figaro.

13. (C) Boche said that since he was not in the one-on-one meeting he did not know whether Chirac discussed with Mubarak the two recent bombings in Christian communities near Beirut. The Egyptian president told Le Figaro, which did ask the question, that people should be cautious about assigning blame for these attacks to Syria. He said that a few such incidents were not unusual, given the circumstances in Lebanon, and that he did not believe they would lead to renewed civil war. Asked by the newspaper about the investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, Mubarak did not mention Syria, assigning no blame to Damascus for either omission or commission. Instead, he evoked the possibility of a shadowy "foreign hand" intent on "sowing discord or setting a trap for Syria. Anything is possible," Mubarak asserted. As with the bombings, Boche told us he did not know whether

Chirac raised the investigation or the Fitzgerald report with Mubarak.

Mubarak's pitch for a permanent UNSC seat for Egypt

14. (C) During the luncheon, at which Boche was present, Mubarak made a concerted appeal for French support for Egypt's bid for a permanent UNSC seat. Mubarak acknowledged that Egypt had gotten a late start in promoting its candidacy. He argued that a continent as large and diverse as Africa could not be represented on the Security Council exclusively by two sub-Saharan, Anglophone states. In a pitch which struck Boche as amusing, in as much as it was delivered in English, Mubarak told Chirac that Egypt would speak for North African and francophone interests, and thus contribute to a more complete reflection of the continent's diversity. Mubarak suggested that Egypt be part of a rotation of holders of an African permanent seat, and made no reference to Egypt or any other African state having the veto. Boche said Chirac responded noncommittally, suggesting to Mubarak that it was up to the candidate countries to promote their own candidacies. Privately, Boche said, France is skeptical about the rotating seat concept.

15. (C) Mubarak recalled his role in hosting the meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Abbas in Sharm el-Sheikh and in assembling rival Palestinian groups in Egypt for dialogue. He deflected a question from Le Figaro as to whether he would invite Sharon to Cairo, saying he had invited him to Sharm, "and that's in Egypt, isn't it," Mubarak quipped. When the journalist pressed, Mubarak said that "Sharon would be well advised to give something to (improve) Palestinian public opinion. That would help us to reinforce our cooperation." Privately, Mubarak told Chirac that he was not confident that Sharon would proceed with withdrawal from the West Bank once the Gaza withdrawal was completed because of what Mubarak assessed to be Sharon's tenuous domestic political standing. He added that he thought the U.S. role in encouraging Israel to move forward with the process was essential. Boche said that Egyptian-Israeli cooperation on patrolling their common border once Israeli forces began to pull out of Gaza was not discussed. Mubarak was asked about this by Le Figaro, replying that Israel had not yet agreed to such discussions. Mubarak told Chirac that Jordan would have been better placed to try to advance its proposal for Arab state normalization with Israel had King Abdallah attended the Arab League Summit. Mubarak appeared irritated that so many of his fellow Arab heads of state, including several of the most moderate, had stayed away from Algiers, leaving him with the likes of Qaddhafi and Bashar, Boche said. Mubarak told Le Figaro that the Jordanian proposal had come as a surprise to Arab Leaders and "appeared to be a retreat from the recommendations of the 2002 Beirut (Arab League) Summit, which we want to reactivate."

Arab reform

16. (C) Mubarak also appeared to take umbrage with what he implied was undue U.S. pressure for democratic reform in the Arab world, and specifically in Egypt, according to Boche. Chirac asked about the situation of Ayman Nour, the only declared opposition candidate for September's presidential election in Egypt, to which Mubarak replied that Nour had been arrested because there was solid evidence of his involvement in fraud. Mubarak asserted that he had initiated reform in Egypt 20 years ago. Egypt, he said, was a great nation and did not need advice from anyone on how to manage its internal affairs, Boche said. Asked about U.S. pressure for reform by Le Figaro, Mubarak avoided controversy, saying reports that he was coming under pressure from the U.S. were "not true." He went on to tell the newspaper, with regard to the "Kefaya" protest, that "certain movements are piloted from outside." Mubarak declined to state whether he would be a candidate for re-election and said there was "no truth" to reports that his son, Gamal, would be a candidate. He told the newspaper that the continuing state of emergency, in place since 1981, was necessary to combat terrorism. He also said he opposed term limits for the president because this would "hinder the free will of the people." Nor could he accept any limitation of the powers of the president because this would mean that the prime minister "would be subject to pressures which he could not face up to," adding that "the president of the republic is the guarantee of stability."

Iraq

17. (C) Finally, on Iraq, Mubarak publicly welcomed the January elections as "clearly a good thing for Iraq" and

encouraged Sunnis "to participate in the political process and the elaboration of a constitution." Privately, Mubarak told Chirac that he was not optimistic about Iraq's future because the security situation was far from being under control.

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